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Pre-Service Teachers: An Analysis of Reading Instruction in High Needs Districts Dual Language Classrooms

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Pre-service teachers need opportunities to apply theory and connect to best practices as they teach in classroom settings be it, whole or small group. For many pre-service teachers often times their experience is limited to simply watching instruction or working with small groups of students (Pryor & Kuhn, 2004). The student teaching experience is a critical component of the teacher preparation program. Through the use of the English Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument (ELLCOI), and researcher observation the hope is that these will aid in bringing to light the instructional activities used by pre-service teachers during reading instruction with ELLs. This study explores how pre-service bilingual teachers connect theory into practice by examining their instruction in the following categories: Instructional Practices, Interactive Teaching, English-Language Development, and Content Specific to Reading as listed in The English Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument (ELLCOI) developed by Haager, Gersten, Baker, and Graves (2003). To capture these instructional events video tape recordings of eight South Texas pre-service teachers were taken during a reading language arts lesson in order to observe instruction in high need districts' dual language/bilingual classrooms. Data were compiled to capture the nature and quality of instruction on key essential elements, as well as reading instructional practices specific to the teaching/learning process in the dual language classroom. The findings portray the results of the ELLCOI with bilingual/ESL pre-service teachers and how they make sense of their instructional practices as a means to instruction in one-way dual language public school classrooms.

Key Words: English Language Learner, Dual Language, Pre-Service Teacher, Instructional Practices, Reading Language Arts

INTRODUCTION

The beginning bilingual teacher faces an additional challenge beyond the traditional first year classroom perils that is teaching reading to English language learners (ELLs). It has been argued that principles of effective reading instruction are directly relevant for teaching reading to ELLs (Gersten & Baker, 2000; Haager & Windmueller, 2001). Research detailed in a report by the National Academy of Sciences (August & Hakuta, 1997) and in a research synthesis by Gersten and Baker (2000) found that information on effective reading instruction in a second language with ELLs is limited since research has not focused on understanding instructional variables, but rather on evaluating policy initiatives with limited evidence of actual classroom practices, specifically reading practices for ELLs (August & Hakuta, 1997; Gersten & Baker, 2000). This discrepancy in research has affected policy and decisions which result in gaps for classroom practice.

Researchers often claim that teachers ignore research findings; teachers, in turn, complain that university-based researchers do not acknowledge the realities of classroom teaching (Clarke, 1994). Therefore, in order to develop curriculum and strategies that bridge the gap between theory and best practices in teaching and learning, we need to understand what difference this makes in classroom teachers' understandings of instruction. Through the use of the English Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument (ELLCOI), and researcher observation the hope is that these will aid in bringing to light the instructional activities used by pre-service teachers during reading instruction with ELLs.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess instructional practices used by bilingual pre-service teachers with English Language Learners as they relate to reading and literacy development in high need districts' dual language/bilingual classrooms. The English Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument developed by Haager, Gersten, Baker, and Graves (2003) was used to measure reading instruction in the following categories: Instructional Practices, Interactive Teaching, and Content Specific to Reading. Additionally, observers recorded qualitative field notes as related to the instrument categories.

Background

Given the lack of research on understanding instructional variables there is much that we still don't understand about the processes of teacher education and teaching when associated with English language learners. As researchers attempted to understand the process of bilingual teacher teaching strategies, we need to analyze pre-service teachers' field lessons, and actions. We need to think about how these processes interact, and how they can help pre-service teachers implement effective instruction for ELLs in an attempt to meet students' needs and close the achievement gap. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the Nation's Report Card, revealed that in 2009, fourth-grade students in the United States were mastering basic reading skills (U. S. Department of Education, 2009b, 2009c). However, only

8% of all fourth graders achieved at the *advanced level*ⁱ in reading. More than half (51%) of Latino fourth graders scored at the *below basic* reading level, while only 3% achieved at the *advanced level*. In the case of English language learners (ELLs), results are even less promising. Seventy-one percent of fourth graders scored at *below basic* level in reading. This level of achievement by Latino students and ELLs is alarming, given that one out of five children in the United States is now Latino (Mather & Foxen, 2010) and that about 11% of U.S. students are ELLs (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a).

The dramatic increase of ELLs in schools throughout the United States has led to a need in changes for successful instruction of ELLs. It is also projected that in 2050, one-third of the overall U.S. population will be Latino (Mather & Foxen, 2010) giving rise to the language and educational needs of the English Language Learner. In fact, Spanish is, and given the projections for growth, will continue to be the language spoken by the largest population of English language learners in the United States (Bravo-Valdivieso, 1995). This brings to light the issue that the mastery of oral language and reading comprehension in English has been an ever-present struggle for Spanish speaking ELLs (Thomas & Collier, 1997), particularly when students are not receiving appropriate services.

Effective bilingual education programs develop students' English-reading skills through the use of the student's native language. Proficiency in the native language is viewed as a valuable resource for learning English (Cummins, 1991). English-only approaches such as English as a second language (ESL), sheltered Instruction, or immersion programs deemphasize the student's native language (Osorio-O'Dea, 2001). However, much is still to be learned on best reading instructional practices for English Language Learners since there is a lack of ongoing, systematic research investigating the needs of English language learners developing reading skills in a second language (Haager & Windmueller, 2001). Cummins (1991), found that languages develop interdependently, which means that the level of proficiency in one language has an effect on the level of proficiency in the other language. Although the ultimate goal of reading instruction for ELLs is reading English successfully, many of the models for instructing ELLs differ in the amount and duration of instruction that students receive in their primary and secondary language.

Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, and Christian, (2006) stated that the characteristic of quality instruction is meeting the needs of all students in reading; it is essential and should be the same for linguistically and culturally diverse students. Emphasis should be placed on going from the known to the unknown by drawing on students' cultural background and prior knowledge so that instruction can build on these experiences. Instruction should take advantage of students' first language to support learning in a second language. This should include learning skills, such as, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing developed on the basis of the students' language and literacy strengths and needs (Teale, 2009). Because of this, focus of instruction should be placed on the learner's ability to comprehend the lesson content and not on the learner's language proficiency

(Myburgh, Poggenpoel, and Rensburg, 2004).

Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation, skills and knowledge about teaching do indeed impact students' learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Haycock, 1998; Nieto, 2000). The student teaching experience is a critical component of teacher preparation programs. Merrill (2002) suggested that learning occurs when knowledge is applied to real world experiences. It is the time when they can "integrate and use their knowledge" in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 305). This is the culminating time when theory and practice come together. Many researchers agree that knowledge about teaching and learning is improved when pre-service teachers have multiple opportunities to apply these in meaningful contexts (Allsopp, De Marie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006; Pryor & Kuhn, 2004).

METHOD

Research Design

Since we were observing behavior of one specific group, bilingual student teachers, researchers chose to implement a single-case study. Yin (2009) argues that a "case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p. 4). According to Best and Kahn (2006), one of the features of a single case research is the "repeated measurement of observation" in order to ensure reliable and valid data. For this reason, the participants were videotaped during two different lessons and attended a one-on-one exit interview (participant and researcher). For the purpose of this study we evaluated reading lessons using the Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument to record student teachers strategies, modifications, and techniques in instruction as well as reading strategies. During the reading lesson, the observer took qualitative field notes relating to the content of the items (e.g., examples of explicit modeling or ensuring that all students participate in small-group instruction). These notes were then used to guide the observer in completing the rating.

The study design gave the researchers an opportunity to analyze classroom instruction as related to reading language arts. Pre-service teachers can benefit from the support of their colleagues and the knowledge that they are not alone. When pre-service teachers are given the opportunity to reflect on their actual teaching practices, Clift and Brady, (2006) stated it "can produce changes in pre-service teachers' ideas about teaching, learning, and the competence of learners" (p. 316).

Participants

The semester before student teaching, the researchers asked the university office of field experience for the names of all student teachers that were to be placed in the targeted school districts. The list was comprised of 18 elementary bilingual/ESL pre-service teachers. The researchers extended invitations to each of them to participate in this study. Sixteen of the eighteen agreed to participate. At the start of the study, the

participants were reminded of the requirementsⁱⁱ of the study. Five of the participants opted out of participating in the study, resulting in only 11 participants. Of the eleven participants, only eightⁱⁱⁱ completed all of the components of the research.

All the participants were of Latin origin and ranged in age from 20-35 years old; all but one was female. Each participant was an elementary education teacher candidate with specialization in bilingual/ESL education major. All participants had also completed all theoretical coursework, which included education-reading courses. At the time of the study, all participants were completing a required 12-week student teaching internship. They were placed in schools located along the Texas U.S.-Mexican border; in two specific school districts that offered one-way dual language enrichment education in which academic and language instruction was delivered in Spanish and English to students whose primary language was Spanish. At the time of the research there was no professor-student relationship with any of the participants. For the data reported in this article, pseudonyms have been given to all participants.

Setting

The research took place in South Texas, in an area along the Texas and Mexico border. The region has been described as one of the poorest regions in the United States (Lopez, 2006; Maril, 1989; Murillo, 2010) with a “per capita income of \$15,184 a year, less than half the national average of \$31,472” (Lopez, p.11). A major contributor to the economic struggles of the area is the level of educational attainment of the population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the percentage of people in the region who are 25 and older and hold a high school diploma accounted for 50%, in comparison to 75% in Texas. As a result, the schools serve a large percentage of children who are considered by the education system as “at risk for school failure” due to their poverty and ELL status.

The demographics of both districts are representative of the region: District A’s student population was composed of 98% Hispanic, 42% ELL, and 89% economically disadvantage. District B’s student population was composed of 99% Hispanic, 51% ELL, and 96% economically disadvantage. Most of the elementary schools where the research was conducted typify what has been claimed by the literature in reference to schools serving low income and minority students, the “accountability pressures are often exacerbated by persistent, long-standing elements of school culture that affect teachers’ and students’ experiences” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 330). Consequently, the “curriculum” often mandated by administrators relied on worksheets, Accelerated Reader program, Reading First, and test preparation materials.

Instrument

Observations were conducted across multiple classrooms utilizing the English-Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument (ELLCOI), designed to be used in a research context. Few observation instruments exist that are specifically designed to examine instruction in ELL classrooms with an emphasis in reading. This instrument was built on factors identified by research as critical in beginning reading instruction (Haager, et al. 2003). The ELLCOI is composed of 29 items rated on a 1-4

Likert scale, 4 indicates “Very effective,” 3 represents “Moderately effective,” 2 represents “Partially effective,” and 1 represented “Not effective”. These items are divided into the following categories: Instructional Practices, Interactive Teaching, English-Language Development and Content Specific to Reading. Moreover, the ratings are complemented by qualitative notation of activities and responses that related to each item or section. The instrument allows for examination of classroom instruction qualitatively enriching the information obtained with the rating scale (Haager, et al., 2003).

The English Language Learner Classroom Observation Instrument was field-tested in 1999 and 2000 in 43 Southern California first-grade classrooms in where at least half of the students were English learners. According to Gersten, et al. (2005), the median inter-observer agreement was 74%, with a range from 55% to 88%. It is further stated that this is a conservative estimate of instrument reliability, as it is based on item-by-item agreement.

Data Sources and Data Analysis

To examine the teaching strategies used by pre-service teachers, a variety of methods were utilized in this case study to gain an insight into the pre-service teachers’ lessons. Various sources of data were collected: (1) videotapes of pre-service teachers teaching a language arts lesson; (2) two semi-structured focus groups conducted at the university, which lasted about 90 minutes each; and (3) a two-hour semi-structured exit interview.

The participants were videotaped teaching a language arts lesson in their assigned student teaching field classroom. After data were gathered the researchers, two education professors with different perspectives and professional abilities, reviewed the videos using the ELLCOI. Items that were not observed received no point value and were excluded in overall scoring. Additionally, ratings were complemented with qualitative field notes of activities and responses observed regarding the classroom context. Inter-rater reliability was established through joint observations and frequent conferencing following independent completion of rating scales. The inter-rater reliability among the researchers in classifying the rating scale was 75%. For those items on which there were disagreements, the coders reached consensus.

During the two semi-structured focus groups, the researchers asked guided open-ended questions to lead participants in discussion of the challenges and successes during their student teaching. In addition, an exit interview was conducted in which the participants observed their videotaped lessons, assessed using the ELLCOI and commented on their teaching. To help participants share their experiences, all were asked the same set of questions, although probing questions were added.

FINDINGS

We observed eight dual language classrooms that were using a prescriptive curriculum. To measure instructional practices as related to English reading language arts instruction in dual language/bilingual instruction, The English Language Learner

Classroom Observation Instrument was used. The researchers wanted to answer the question: How effective were instructional practices used as determined by results of the English Language Learner Observation Instrument? The observation inventory was used to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional and reading strategies during the reading language arts lesson. Based on the results from the instrument's 29 items rated on a 1-4 Likert scale, pre-service teachers were not effectively implementing bilingual /dual language, sheltered techniques and reading strategies. The overall mean score for the 29 items was 2.450, which corresponds to the partially effective range.

Table 1 shows an item analysis for the first two categories of the ELLCOI instrument, instructional practices and interactive teaching. The range of performance on each outcome measure was close in range with the exception of the quality of independent practice. This is attributed to limited opportunities observed for independent practice or controlled independent practice. The data also demonstrated that despite large gaps in the research base (August & Hakuta, 1997), observers with a solid background in reading can discern practices likely to accelerate or impede English learners' learning how to read (Gersten, et al. p. 202).

Table 1: Instructional practices and interactive teaching mean score

Models skills and strategies during lesson	2.714
Makes relationships among concepts overt	2.652
Emphasizes distinctive features of new concepts	2.928
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad range of examples and non-examples Examples used to show relevant and irrelevant features 	
Provides prompts and cues in how to use strategies, skills, and concepts	2.857
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (e.g., guided practice, scaffolds, steps and procedures) 	
Teaches difficult vocabulary prior to lesson, or during lesson as needed	2.857
Achieves high level of response accuracy in context of lesson objectives	2.785
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (e.g., spelling accuracy on a spelling test vs. spelling accuracy on a written assignment) 	
Rate the quality of independent practice	1.833
Secures and maintains student attention during lesson, as needed.	3.000
Gives feedback on academic performance	2.428
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reiterates, clarifies, reinforces Communicates clearly what students did correctly or how they can improve Focuses on lesson objective Focuses on performance specifics (i.e., not just "Good" or "Wrong") 	
Engages in <i>ongoing</i> monitoring of student understanding and performance <i>during</i> lesson	2.607
Elicits responses from all students, including students having difficulty with task at hand	2.714
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calls on range of students Poses questions that students can answer 	

As the researchers observed the videos, they took field notes on the ELLCOI. Their recorded observations along with the mean scores of the measures described above reflect a range of instructional qualities. Analysis of the qualitative notes revealed that most effective pre-service teachers attempted to use effective strategies such as: using repetition, providing different examples, making relations of concept to real life activities, giving verbal examples of the concept explained, modeling the activity, and

using visuals to discuss vocabulary. In most observations the pre-service teacher did not restate student responses or expand on them when appropriate. In all pre-service teachers also did not utilize any cooperative learning strategies. Data also revealed in most observations literacy activities were too lengthy and students lost interest and were off task. Moreover, this also reduced the amount of time available for additional activities.

In Table 2 the results for English language development ranged between partially effective to moderately effective. The pre-service teachers ranked highest at or near a 3 for moderately effective in the areas of adjusting English for comprehension, using manipulatives, and giving directions, other areas which include opportunities for students to speak, incorporating students responses, providing explicit instruction, allowing wait time, elaborating on responses, and using facial gestures ranked in the partially effective range. The lowest ranking of not effective to partially effective was in the teacher and or student strategically use the students native language to understand content category. The higher ratings were in the pre-service teachers' use of English for comprehension, using manipulatives, and giving clear oral directions. Qualitative field notes taken include the following qualities of typified effective classrooms in isolated individual cases: Utilizing PowerPoint and other visuals to explain the concept, explaining vocabulary, giving students examples of vocabulary and having student use it and also having students expand on answers by asking why. Other observation notes that would characterize a less effective classroom included; the pre-service teacher accepting one word answer to questions, translating information, and eliciting few students' responses. In one case the pre-service teacher gave an activity with no instructions. Also, in a majority of the classrooms the pre-service teachers posited questions then proceeded to answer the questions themselves.

Table 2: English language development mean score

Adjusts own use of English to make concepts comprehensible	2.928
Uses visuals or manipulatives to teach content	3.071
Gives oral directions that are clear and appropriate for level of students' English language development	3.071
Structures opportunities for students to speak	2.5
Selects and incorporates students' responses, ideas, examples, and experiences into the lesson	2.571
Provides explicit instruction in English language use, and includes the use of cue and prompts	2.416
Gives students wait time to respond to questions	2.5
Encourages students to give elaborate responses	2.142
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prompts students to expand on one-word or short answers • Prompts student to provide more information • Prompts student to give more complete responses 	
The teacher and/or students strategically use students' native language to help students understand content	1.916
Uses gestures and facial expressions in teaching vocabulary and clarifying meaning of content	2.357

Table 3 displays the results if the item analysis for Content specific to reading/language arts. Instrument mean results in this category rated at zero for

providing systematic explicit instruction for phonetic elements and vocabulary development. A mean score of 2 was recorded for the areas of comprehension and interactions with text. Observation notes showed that most teachers relied on books or pictures when teaching vocabulary in some cases participant used very basic vocabulary strategies such as defining the word, using it in a sentence. Researchers did not observe any instruction for phonemic awareness, decoding, or phonics. Comprehension and interaction with text scores were at moderately effective. Researcher observations noted that pre-service teachers did not build prior knowledge and utilized round robin or popcorn reading as the primary reading strategy. When the participant read aloud they did not read with prosody or facial expression. The participants periodically checked for comprehension by asking, right there questions^{iv} and often answered their own question or did not have students expand on their responses and accepted single word answers.

Table 3: Content specific to reading/language arts mean score

Provides systematic, explicit instruction in the following areas	0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonemic Awareness • Letter-sound correspondence • Decoding • Vocabulary & vocabulary concept development 	
Checks student comprehension of text by asking questions	2
Engages students in meaningful interactions about text	2

While many of the qualitative observation comments may appear positive, there was a lack of consistency. Some activities may translate into an effective teaching practice but given the context of the activity they were many that lacked consistency, follow through, and most lessons failed to challenge the students or allow for student centered instruction. Effective strategies were observed on a single case basis and were not consistent across the participants' lessons. The participants also had the opportunity to evaluate their own teaching using the ELLCOI. Results of their self-evaluation immediately after teaching the lesson are shown in Table 4. Data revealed that in the self-evaluation of their teaching using the ELLCOI they thought they were following theory and best practices. The participants overwhelmingly rated themselves as being effective to very effective in all categories based on how they taught their lesson without seeing themselves on video.

After having the opportunity to view their own video of teaching, the participants realized that most of their instruction was teacher centered and they did most of the talking, controlled the learning, read the story out loud themselves and often limited students to following along with the reading. When confronted with this reality the participants were able to offer their justifications for the strategies they implemented. To identify emergent themes, the researchers followed Guba and Lincoln's (1981) framework and what Moustakas (1994) called "clusters of meaning," they looked for phrases and words that: (a) were repeated by a number of participants; (b) were deemed important by participants; (c) stand out because of their uniqueness; and (d) were supported by the literature. Most of their responses fell into the following

themes: (a) elementary students were not accustomed to or able to complete independent or higher level reading activities, (b) time constraints, (c) test preparation prescribed curriculum required by administrators, and (d) lack of preparation on the participants' part.

As a way to justify the eye-opening results of their self-evaluation, the pre-service teacher group made the following comments during focus group discussions. Participants mentioned that their students were not accustomed to activities that required analyzing, synthesizing or evaluating information. One of the participants mentioned, "I didn't see a lot of challenge." Another participant noted, "children are very smart, but the teachers do not use their full potential. They limit them to worksheets, rote vocabulary memorization, and limited skills/objective development. Students are not accustomed to instruction in which they are actively engaged for a majority of the lesson. Students are generally in a passive learning mode and do not know how to engage in activities that require higher levels of interaction, thinking and independent or cooperative activities."

Another response among participants centered on time. Many of them conveyed that they were pressed for time. Thus, they could not implement a variety of reading language arts strategies or activities, and they were not able to expand on the topic as much as they would have liked. Mercedes mentioned: "many times effective instructional strategies need to be suspended and even a whole lesson cannot be completed the way it's supposed to; or teachers have to run- it too fast so they can continue with the next class or topic." Teachers are afraid to modify or veer from the curriculum. Due to this lack of in-depth coverage of the concepts, students are not granted a quality education. Adriana, shared her frustration on this matter;

"Sometimes I get frustrated because they are pressuring me that I have to finish the topic/story and I would like to do more activities, but they don't let me. They just rush you to finish because next week you have to cover another lesson. You cannot teach at the students' pace." The rushing of the concepts leaves many "children behind."

Also, with the pressures of the time and curriculum teachers are limiting students on the outcome lengths and also lowering student expectations since they feel they have not adequately taught the material.

Many researchers have argued that teachers in low socioeconomic schools have little flexibility and input regarding what to teach and how to do it (Palmer & Wicktor-Lynch, 2008; Orfield and Lee, 2005). Despite teachers' beliefs concerning what constitutes effective teaching and best practice, teachers' interpretation of administrative and curriculum demands have a profound impact on their classroom instruction and environment as a result many teachers react like Bianca: "Teachers are pressured to follow Reading First guidelines even though they do not agree with them or believe them." Maria commented: "Teachers are so busy they have so many things like progress monitoring, RTI^v, TPRI^{vi}, and Tier 2^{vii}. instruction with the kids, where does the instruction go?" Moreover, Erik stated, "Teachers need to keep up with the

research in order to back yourself up or defend what you are doing”. The participants and their mentor teachers in this study faced the same fate. The district and administrators dictate what curriculum and materials are to be used in the classroom as evidenced in Adriana’s comment, “they are just watching you to make sure you are following what the district wants or what the principal has ordered.” This was also confirmed by a majority of the peers in the group discussion. They felt that teachers did not have the freedom to choose the instructional practices and curriculum most appropriate for their students, but they were also watched over to make sure they followed the required prescribed curriculum designed to “prepare” students for the state mandated test. For example, Erik has noticed that in his class they are not really doing writing or any of the other subjects with math coming along for TAKS^{viii} teachers are teaching math all day long. He mentioned:

I can see a big difference in the instruction and even the amount of subjects the students are introduced to when the TAKS test is around the corner. During my first week, there was a fair share of time spent on different subjects, but recently math and reading seem to be getting most of the time. I do realize that they want to cover everything that could come out on the test, but I think it is important for the students to be exposed to all the subjects.

Table 4: Participants mean response for instrument categories self evaluation

Participant	Instructional Practices	Interactive Teaching	Adaptations for Individual Differences	General Instructional Environment	English Language Development	Content Specific to Reading/Language Arts
1.	3.428	3.5	3.5	3.333	3.4	3
2.	3.857	3.75	3	3.66	3.2	3
4.	3.166	3.25	3.5	3	3.1	3
5.	3.333	3.5	3	3.333	3.2	3
6.	3.5	3.5	4	3	3.4	3
7.	3.571	3.25	3	3.333	3.2	3
8	0	0	0	0	0	0

The experiences of the participants “in high-stakes classrooms shape their pedagogical development” (Brown, 2010, p. 477) resulting in lack of effort and time in the preparation of challenging lessons. About half of the participants recognized that they did not dedicate the necessary time to be “well prepared. Given the results researchers concluded that teachers’ perceptions and interpretations of administrative and curricular demands are leading teachers to utilize strategies that are not considered best practices and influence pre-service teachers paradigm as measured by the ELLCOI. In the focus group discussions, the pre-service teachers justified the strategies they used based on how they were taught and what they observed the mentor teacher doing and believed to be effective. Ultimately, the exit interviews revealed that pre-service teachers were driven by their mentor teachers’ request in response to pressures of administrative and curriculum demands.

DISCUSSION

Data from this study support the notion that teacher preparation, beliefs, knowledge,

and experience are important factors in teaching and teaching beginning reading. The findings of this case study revealed that despite theoretical knowledge and classroom strategies learned in course work, pre-service teachers implemented methods based on mentor teachers and or administrations' expectations, or limited their activities to the demand of the curriculum. The participants also did not demonstrate reading activities that included cooperative learning, student centered instruction, and hands on opportunities or sheltered techniques when needed that are considered by research findings to be best practices. However, the actual demands of the required state/district curriculum strongly influence actual classroom practice. Instructors in teacher preparation programs need to be aware of the existing realities in order to incorporate these and belief systems that pre-service teachers possess to effectively translate existing beliefs about teaching and learning so that pre-service teachers leave teacher preparation programs with strategies in line with current research about the teaching and learning process that can accommodate the current state/district curricular demands. Pre-service teachers should assess students' responsiveness to their instruction, and be able to make reasonable, data informed adjustments in teaching practice when needed. Schools cannot continue to ignore English language learners' needs and not use instructional practices appropriate to ELLs or dual language/ bilingual instructional methods to teach. The data reveal that pre-service teachers implemented instruction that reflects the methodology, curriculum or district requirements they encountered regardless of whether or not it meshes with research based best practices that they learned in the teacher preparation program. This study makes a case for the need of well-designed field based experiences for pre-service teachers and dual language and bilingual instructional strategies that promote reading, cooperative learning, teacher centered instruction and best teaching practices, especially for students who are English language learners. These findings confirm the need for more research in the area of actual classroom practices in order to develop curriculum and strategies that bridge the gap between theory and best practices in teaching and learning, in order to meet the existing and predicted growth of ELLs.

EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Much of the teacher education literature focuses on teacher education programs, in general, but there is a lack of information on how pre-service teachers, specializing in the area of bilingual and ESL education, are being prepared to teach reading in a dual language or bilingual setting. If we want Hispanic English language learners to reach high levels of reading, critical thinking skills and high levels of academic achievement, it is important to study what instructional strategies, specifically reading strategies, bilingual/ESL pre-service teachers are using during field-experience. It is imperative that teacher educators understand how pre-service teachers are teaching and dealing with the realities of instructional demands curriculum, planning and implementation and learn to incorporate appropriate teaching practices. This information may then be used to guide future instructional and field based training in effective reading and instructional strategies for dual language and bilingual instruction that could better prepare pre-service teachers for their future classroom.

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Footnotes

- ⁱ NAEP Achievement Levels: (1) Basic: denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade assessed; (2) Proficient: represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed: demonstrate competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter; (3) Advance: denote superior performance at each grade assessed.
- ⁱⁱ Requirements of study: (1) attend Reading Strategies training, (2) video tape participants conducting a language arts lesson and a math lesson, (3) participants attend two focus groups, and (4) participants attend an individual exit interview.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Three participants attended all the focus groups. One of the three participants was only videotaped for the math lesson and did not attend the exit interview; another participant did not participated on the videotaping of the lessons but completed the exit interview; and the third participant only attended the focus groups. We excluded the information of these three participants.
- ^{iv} Right There: The questions ask who, what, where, when, and sometimes why. The answers to the questions are right there in what you are reading.

^v RTI: Response to Intervention, state required assessment in Texas

^{vi} TPRI : Texas Primary Reading Inventory, state required assessment in Texas

^{vii} Tier 2 Intervention, reading intervention with small group as part of RTI

^{viii} TAKS: Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, the state mandated assessment in Texas